

STUDYING POTENTIAL HEALTH EFFECTS IN CLEAN-UP WORKERS INVOLVED IN THE GULF OF MEXICO DEEPWATER HORIZON OIL SPILL: THE GULF STUDY

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Background and Aims: The Gulf Long-term Follow-up Study (GuLF STUDY) will investigate potential short- and long-term health effects associated with clean-up activities following the Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. Crude oil, burning oil, and the dispersants used during clean-up efforts contain a range of known and suspected toxins. Over 100,000 persons have participated in clean-up activities related to the spill. While most of these individuals participated in active clean-up efforts, others did not. Exposures among clean-up workers range from negligible to potentially significant, especially for those involved in tasks associated with direct exposure to crude or burning oil, or to chemical dispersants. The potential health effects associated with the levels of exposure experienced by clean-up workers are largely unstudied. Heat and stress experienced by these workers may also have adverse long-term health effects. In addition to the oil itself, the widespread economic and lifestyle disruption caused by the oil spill may contribute to mental health problems among this population.

Methods: The GuLF STUDY has begun enrollment of 55,000 workers and controls across the United States through a telephone interview. Approximately 20,000 of these workers will undergo additional follow-up through a home visit where anthropometric, physiologic, biologic and environmental measurements are collected. We intend to study a wide range of health outcomes particularly respiratory, neurological, hematologic, and psychological or mental health.

Results: We will present preliminary results from the first six months of enrollment and data collection.

Conclusions: The GuLF STUDY is the largest study of its kind and will provide valuable information on potential exposures and health effects associated with this and future oil-spill clean-up efforts.